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Study on the English Translation of the Names of Ceramic Artifacts in Museums

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Abstract: By analyzing the structure and language characteristics of the names of ceramic exhibits in the collection, this paper puts forward the main points of translation and the corresponding translation methods, further analyzes the components of the names of porcelain from the perspective of glaze color, shape, decoration, place of origin, age and other aspects. The purpose of this study is to standardize the translation of the names of ceramic artifacts in the museum's collection, and to improve the appreciation and awareness of the museum's porcelain among international tourists.

Keywords: Porcelain Names; English Translation; Collection Artifact; Reader Orientation.

1. Introduction

The collection of ceramics is one of the important platforms for cultural display. Porcelain names carry rich cultural information. At the same time, as museum exhibits, its translation is limited by time and space. It is necessary to translate such unique information into English to better spread Chinese culture and allow foreign tourists to better understand Chinese culture. It is a topic worthy of research.

2. The Composition of Porcelain Names

Porcelain names are very informative, and their main function is to provide tourists with various information about the identified objects, so that tourists can identify and understand the cultural elements contained in the porcelain names and better appreciate the exhibits. The names of the ceramics in museums generally appear in museum text materials such as signposts, interpretive panels, labels, catalogues, and leaflets. From the structural analysis, the name of porcelain is mainly composed of two parts: generic name and attribute name.

A generic name, a common name, refers to a class of things and a specific one of them. Here it refers to different types (mainly in the form of Items classified), such as: cut utensils-bottles, jars, statues, etc.; round utensils - plates, bowls, dishes, etc.

The attribute name is an important component in the name, which usually indicates the characteristics of the utensil, including glaze color, decoration, utensil shape, origin, age, etc.

3. Language Features and Translation Points of Porcelain Names

Due to the differences between Eastern and Western cultures, English and Chinese have formed their own different characteristics and habits. Chinese is a parataxis language with lexical meaning and loose syntactic structure; while English is a hypotaxis language with morphological meaning and strict syntactic structure [1]. In addition, factors such as the unequal word meanings and cultural background differences between the two languages have brought many challenges to the English translation of porcelain. The description of the name of ancient porcelain is complicated. It not only includes several aspects involved in general ceramic utensils, but also includes the kiln mouth and production era of the utensils [2]. For example: "*Qing Yongzheng pastel cup with peach pattern*", which indicates its production time (*Yongzheng (1723-1736), Qing Dynasty (1644-1912)*), glaze (pastel), decoration (peach pattern), vessel shape (cup), and even the technique of decoration (over branches) also included. The arrangement order of these information, the change of word meaning, the vacancy of word meaning, the inflection after English translation, and the processing of culture-loaded words all bring difficulties to translation.

3.1. Attribute Name Order

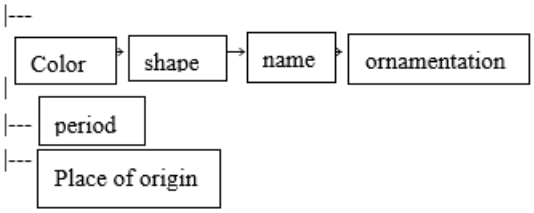


Fig 1. The order of modifiers in the translation

In terms of structure, the common names and attribute names of Chinese porcelain names are simply juxtaposed structures, but when translated into English, they must be replaced with strict grammatical structures. Therefore, many parallel attribute names in Chinese cannot be translated into English in parallel, and word order structures must be considered. In addition, the name of porcelain as a collection of exhibits is limited by space, and the reading environment of tourists should also be considered. Therefore, the source language information should be re-integrated to highlight the key points, so that tourists can obtain information in a relatively short period of time. From a psychological point of view, color and shape are the first information that tourists can obtain when viewing objects from a distance. Therefore, in English, this modifier should be prefixed, and the decoration process can be affixed with the with structure after the generic name. The information of the age and origin can be separated and wrapped separately, so as to avoid the translated name being too long and achieve the purpose of effectively

conveying the information. The order of modifiers in the translation can be summarized as shown in the figure 1.

3.2. Changes in the Meaning of Words

In the English translation of ceramic names, the change of word meaning is also a major factor affecting the accuracy of the translation. In the long history, the daily practical functions of some utensils in the early stage of production have gradually degenerated or changed, and with the development of manufacturing and decoration technology, they have evolved into complete decorative functions in the later stage. For example, in the pastel-colored character story, the "*Gu*" is a vessel used for drinking in ancient China. It was popular in the Shang Dynasty (B.C.1600-B.C.1046) and the Western Zhou Dynasty (B.C.1046-B.C.771). However, in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) Dynasties, the *Gu* was no longer a wine vessel, but became an ornament of wealth and taste. Therefore, the early bronze ware can be translated as Gu, wine container, while the late porcelain vases that lost the function of the wine vessel should be translated as Gu-shaped vase.

3.3. Vocabulary Vacancies

The decoration of ceramic utensils is an important window to show the culture of porcelain. Most of these decorations are unique to China and have unique shapes and meanings. Common patterns are miscellaneous treasure patterns, *Bogu* patterns, various allusions painting patterns or engraving graphics, which are used to show the social life and culture at that time. When translating, pay attention to vacancies in word meanings or cultural defaults that are easily caused by cultural and language differences between English and Chinese. The content of cultural default generally does not find the answer in the context, which will cause a vacuum of sense [3]. For example: Dehua kiln white porcelain *Zhang Guolao Cao Guojiu* porcelain sculpture. Chinese tourists are very familiar with the story of the Eight Immortals, but Western tourists have no idea of it. Therefore, the translation should appropriately make up for the corresponding cultural background missed from the perceptive of the target readers. This example can be translated as white-glazed ceramic Taoist immortal figurines, which supplements the identities of Zhang Guolao and Cao Guojiu.

3.4. Inflectional Change of Word Meaning

During the translation process, the difference between the text and the real object also needs to be checked in detail, otherwise it may lead to the miscommunication caused by differences. Common differences include: [1] Singular and Plural: no matter the number of nouns in Chinese, there are countless changes in vocabulary, but English is different. [2] Unequal synonyms: There is a "super synonym culture" in Chinese, and one word can often be used to express a class of things with similar properties or uses, but these general words cannot be found in English, which brings a lot of trouble to translators who cannot see the real thing.

3.5. Culture-loaded Words

Culturally loaded words contain rich and unique cultural information in the source language, and translations need to supplement and explain the background knowledge that readers of the relevant target language may need to know. Due to the limitation of display space, the notable feature of exhibit names is simplicity. For obvious information provided in the source language or information that needs to be supplemented by a large amount of cultural background, the translator should appropriately delete or blur it to avoid the translated name being too long.

4. Translation Method of Each Component of Porcelain Name

In the 1960s, the American scholar Eugene Nida put forward the reader response theory, claiming that the research object of translation is the reader or the language receiver. He emphasized that the translation should pay attention to "the overall impact of the message on the recipient".[4] When translating, the translation should not only stay on the correspondence of the language level, but should adjust the content and format from the perspective of tourists, so as to improve the quality of tourists' response and appreciation [5] and "provide the tourists with a channel [6]" to better understand Chinese porcelain culture. The following is a detailed discussion on the English translation method of porcelain names from the aspects of attribute names, colors indicated by common names, vessel shapes, decorations, and origin and age.

4.1. Translation of Glaze

The development of Chinese porcelain glaze is from unglazed to glazed, from single-color glaze to multi-color glaze, and then from underglaze to overglaze, and gradually develops into multicolored and bucket-colored underglaze and overglaze painting and so on [7]. From the perspective of translation, the cognition of color is shared by Chinese and Western readers. The translation method of monochromatic glaze intends to use literal translation. But as to multi-colored glaze, literal translation may cause readers to misunderstand due to the influence of regional and cultural differences. Therefore, such translations should be analyzed in detail. Main colors can be translated. Colors can also be literally translated when two cultures agree on the same color. Those which represent a specific glazing process should be regarded as a proper name translation, and can be transliterated in the context of its name identification. For the names of glaze colors that are widely circulated in the West, the translations that have been accepted by Western readers should be retained as much as possible, and the principle of convention should be followed.

4.2. Translation of the Shape of the Vessel

From the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) to the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing Dynasties (1644-1912), the production process of Chinese porcelain continued to develop. Each piece of porcelain displayed the style and characteristics of the porcelain-making process in a specific era, especially the shape of the porcelain, which was a direct reflection of the inheritance and evolution of the porcelain style. The numerous sub-categories under the generic name of porcelain often indicate a wide variety of ware shapes and names of varying origins, so care must be taken in translation. If the translation is accepted by Western readers, it should be kept as much as possible.

Avoid words with negative associations.

4.3. Translation of Ornament

The decorative patterns of ancient Chinese porcelain are not only rich in subject matter, but also ingenious in

techniques, and “the picture must be intentional, and the meaning must be auspicious”. Homophonic representations and symbolic techniques are often used to express auspicious meanings. When translating, try to use translate the abstraction that specific things refer to. From the perspective of technical composition, the decorative techniques of decoration on porcelain generally refer to coloring (such as *miaojin*--traced in gold or *miaoyin*--traced in silver), composition (such as *tongjing*--continuous landscape, *kaiguang*--framed), and three-dimensional decoration (such as *diaoci*--sculpted and *loukong*--openwork). For these terms, requires the translator to have a certain understanding of the background knowledge in the field of porcelain, and cannot take it literally.

4.4. Translation of Origin and Age

The origin and age of porcelain are generally regarded as supplementary information. In order to facilitate the target readers to obtain valid information when reading, the information can be sorted independently and marked on a new line. For the direct transliteration of place names, the era or dynasties should be transliterated, and the specific AD year should be added at the same time, so as to facilitate Western tourists to understand the corresponding time concept in their familiar time system.

5. Conclusion

As a product of culture and a carrier to reflect culture, porcelain has an irreplaceable position in spreading Chinese culture. The translation of porcelain names has an indispensable and important contribution to the display and dissemination of porcelain culture. Following the reader-centered translation principle, taking into account the acceptance and reading habits of target readers in the translation process, and providing standardized translations for them, will more effectively promote the spread of Chinese culture.

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